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BILL NO: SENATE BILL 718
Telephone Companies – Distribution of Telephone Directories to Residential Customers.

COMMITTEE: Finance

HEARING DATE: March 8, 2011

SPONSORS: Senator Garagiola

POSITION: Support with Amendment

This bill would relax the current requirement that telephone companies must distribute telephone directories to residential customers. Pursuant to regulation, a telephone company is required to print and distribute an alphabetical directory consisting of the names, addresses and telephone numbers of its customers (except for those customers whose numbers are unlisted or non-published). See COMAR 20.45.04.11. The “white pages” directory also typically includes a section with information about using phone services and a section that compiles important governmental phone numbers (sometimes referred to as the “blue section”).

Increasingly, customers are making use of alternative sources of information for telephone numbers. Access to this information is available both through directory assistance and through “free” sources on the internet.

Eventually, having the option available to forego receipt of the paper directory will satisfy certain customers who object to the use of resources to prepare and deliver directories they rarely, if ever, use.

If passed, this Bill will constitute a significant change for customers who are accustomed to automatic receipt of paper directories. In light of the change to decades of past practice, OPC recommends that the Committee consider an amendment to phase in the change. Customers should be given the option to decline receiving the directory for the first year after passage of the Bill. During that year, the telephone companies should engage in a strong public education and notification process to alert customers that:

(1) the customer may decline a printed directory during the initial one year period; and

(2) after a date certain the customer must affirmatively request a directory.

A gradual change to distribution of directories upon request should help to allay customer confusion and concern.

WHEREFORE, with these amendments, OPC recommends a favorable report on Senate Bill 718.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT

Add to Section 8-206 (B):

(1) For a one year period beginning October 1, 2011, a telephone company may not be required to distribute a telephone directory to an address in the State if the property owner or occupant notifies the telephone company to not distribute the directory to his address.

(2) Between October 1, 2011 and September 30, 2012, a telephone company shall engage in a comprehensive public education effort using print media, bill messages, company websites and existing directories to inform customers that beginning October 1, 2012 the customer must request a printed directory or a directory on compact disc, or access the directory on the company website.

(3) A telephone company must make a phone directory available in a clear and conspicuous manner through its website.